

# SOUTHERN BAPTIST **FREE PRESS**

Published Monthly by the COMMITTEE FOR BAPTIST CHURCH AUTONOMY, INC.  
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*A NEW VENTURE IN RELIGIOUS WRITING*



**To the Reader:**

To acquaint you with this new monthly publication, this first issue is offered to you without cost. You may obtain the remaining issues for the coming year by sending one dollar to the above address.

## **Kansas City 1956 Convention**

*In This Issue . . . . .*

### **OUR STORY OF THE RECENT MEETING OF THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION . . . . .**

Documented with statements by reputable news writers who covered the convention  
at Kansas City.

Also giving some inside information never until now published.

James M. Bulman,

Editor

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## COMMITTEE OFFICERS

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## About The Committee . . .

On April 17, 1956, the office of Secretary of State of North Carolina, Thad Eure, issued papers of incorporation for the Committee For Baptist Church Autonomy. Incorporators were C. K. Rand, W. W. Robbins, and J. M. Bulman. As stated in the papers of incorporation, "The Corporation is to have and issue no capital stock and is not organized for the purpose of profit or gain to the members." In addition to the aim to "promote, foster, encourage and establish a free and impartial Baptist press," the charter of incorporation listed as the objects of the Corporation the following: "to promote in every way the best interest of the Baptist Denomination; to preserve and continue democracy in all activities of the Baptist Denomination; to fully restore, establish, maintain and preserve autonomy of the local Baptist Churches, as self governing, independent and religious Congregations; and to oppose improper and unwarranted ecclesiastical authority and protect Baptist integrity in all areas of denominational life."

Then, on May 18, the above-listed officers were elected. (see Associated Press dispatches from Raleigh of the two above dates.)

All officers of the Committee are members of cooperating Baptist churches, financially supporting the denominational work of Southern Baptists. The president and vice-president are laymen: the first is a business man; the second is an attorney and a member of the board of trustees of Meredith College. The other officers are ministers.

The need for such a committee was felt because of the situation that had been brought about by the North Carolina Supreme Court decision in the North Rocky Mount Church case. That situation has been well described by an attorney of Louisville, Ky., who — in writing about the status of individual congregations in his own denomination — made the following statement about the present status of Baptist congregations: "in North Carolina at least, the majority of the members of a Baptist Church *cannot* now legally free themselves from the Southern Baptist Convention and hold on to their property at the same time" (Luther D. Burrus, *The Seminary Review*, Winter, 1956). And this court decision has significance for Baptist churches in other states as well; for, as the attorney just referred to goes on to state: "Because of the North Carolina decision, no longer is there unanimity of opinion among the highest courts of this land as to the degree of congregational autonomy or polity possessed by the membership of a Baptist Church." Furthermore, this situation has been made even more alarming because of the very strange attitude that certain prominent Baptist leaders, in North Carolina and elsewhere, have taken toward this matter.

Because this situation has been viewed as so very serious a threat to traditional Baptist freedom, it has been felt by some that organized action would be necessary to change this situation. Thus the need of a "Committee For Baptist Church Autonomy."



## WHY SUCH A PUBLICATION . . . .

Many persons, from widely-scattered areas, have been expressing the feeling that there is need of a publication which would be genuinely sympathetic with the work of Southern Baptists and yet not averse to the expression of even basic criticisms concerning that work, should such criticisms be needed.

The impression seems to have been created that it is often exceedingly difficult to get anything of a pronouncedly controversial nature published in certain of our denominationally-controlled papers, at least if this controversial material involves a criticism of basic phases of the policies of the Southern Baptist Convention or of a state convention. This impression is certainly borne out by the attitude which the denominationally-controlled papers of North Carolina have taken in recent months to those of us who have been interested in working toward freeing the property of the local Baptist congregations in this state from the conventions' virtual ownership of that property due to the North Carolina Supreme Court decision in the North Rocky Mount Church case. Thus as regards the action taken toward this question of local church autonomy by the 1955 Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, the convention's journal, the *Biblical Recorder* — although publishing a considerable amount of material setting forth an interpretation of that convention's proceedings favorable to the position of the convention leadership — steadfastly refused to publish an interpretation from the viewpoint of those of us on the other side. In fact, the *Biblical Recorder* even refused to sell us an ad for the publication of our position on the autonomy question. Surely, things have fallen to a very un-Baptistic level when a Baptist paper thus refuses to afford space for those of us who as cooperating Baptists are part owners of that paper, when it is our purpose in securing space to defend the historic Baptist position of the complete freedom of the local congregation!

Also, as has been indicated by the above remarks concerning the *Biblical*

*Recorder*, there is evidence that many of our Baptist publications have hesitated to speak clearly in defense of traditional Baptist principle — especially in certain instances when Baptist principle has been greatly endangered. In fact, some Baptist publications — so, at least, it seems very clear to us — have even come out *against* Baptist principle, especially in regard to the current crisis of congregational autonomy in North Carolina.

Of course, there are among Baptist publications certain notable exceptions to the types which we have thus described. As concerns allowing some real freedom of discussion, such an exception has been found in the publication of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, the *Review and Expositor*; although that publication, due to the somewhat technical nature of its articles, is restricted to a comparatively small circle of readers. And, as concerns the championing of Baptist principle in regard to the present issue of congregational autonomy in North Carolina, an exception has been found in the *Religious Herald*; although that publication, which has had the courage to criticize the North Carolina Supreme Court decision in the North Rocky Mount Church case, is naturally somewhat restricted to the interests of Virginia Baptists . . . . And there are other papers that to some extent are to be commended, such as the Kentucky paper, the *Western Recorder*, and no doubt others with which we do not have sufficient familiarity to speak positively.

In spite of these exceptions, however, we have no doubt but that the situation in North Carolina justifies the establishment of another paper in this state. Furthermore, we feel that there is justification for projecting this paper on a *south-wide* basis.

Our new publication, *Southern Baptist Free Press*, is designed to discuss basic issues concerning Southern Baptists and to discuss those issues in a "free and impartial" manner (to quote from our charter of incorporation). By "free" we mean such as will afford opportunity for

the expression of different viewpoints. By "impartial" we mean *not* that this paper has no definite position to set forth, but that every effort will be made to set forth this position fairly.

As the official organ of the "Committee For Baptist Church Autonomy, Inc.," this paper will not be limited to a discussion of the question of local church autonomy; for the Committee itself is not limited to concern with this issue. Any issue deemed to be basically significant for Baptist work will be regarded as lying within the sphere of our interests. Because of the tremendous importance of the issue of congregational autonomy at present, however, this question will naturally receive considerable attention from this paper for some time.

Since this question of local church autonomy will be of such concern to this paper for some time, it is well to point out that this question is not just a North Carolina question. Although it is in North Carolina that the situation concerning church property is especially serious, yet the North Carolina Supreme

Court decision in the North Rocky Mount Church case has implications which cannot be ignored by Baptists in any state. Also, in the trial of that case, testimony contradictory to the Baptist position was given not just by certain leaders connected with the state convention but also by those connected with the Southern Baptist Convention: thus making the matter to be one of concern for all Southern Baptists. Furthermore, because of the presentation of the question, at the recent meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention, of the relationship of that Convention to a local church, and because of the constitutional amendment pertaining to this matter which the Convention will consider next year, — the question of local church autonomy is very definitely one which has concern for all Southern Baptists.

Whether in discussing the current issue of local church autonomy, or some other question, this paper — although published in North Carolina—is intended for Southern Baptists everywhere.

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## ITEMS IN BRIEF . . . .

The current issue of *THE NORTH CAROLINA LAW REVIEW*, published by the University of North Carolina Law School, discusses the North Carolina Supreme Court decision in the North Rocky Mount Church case. And the decision of the court is rather strongly criticized. And the current issue of the *DUKE BAR JOURNAL*, published by the Duke University School of Law, also discusses this court decision and also strongly criticizes the decision. These reputable publications will hardly be suspected of having any "axe to grind" in the current controversy over the autonomy of the local church. Their conclusions—following what would surely be presumed to be a purely legal interest — ought to put the matter in a new perspective for those who have felt that a state Supreme Court decision must be justifiable from a legal standpoint.

Appeal is to be made in September in Nash County Superior Court, Nashville, N. C., for the RE-OPENING OF THE

NORTH ROCKY MOUNT BAPTIST CHURCH CASE. Attorneys for the Rev. Samuel Johnston (who of course was pastor of the majority group in the North Rocky Mount Church, and who is seeking the re-opening of the case) contend for the re-opening, in papers filed in that court some months ago, on the basis of newly-discovered evidence. It is contended that the original constitution of that church has been discovered since the trial, and that this constitution guarantees majority rule. Also, it is contended that portions of the testimony of certain of the witnesses in the case have been contradicted by statements of those witnesses made subsequent to the trial.

Our committee has requested the General Board of the North Carolina Baptist State Convention to secure from the Certified Public Accountant who audits the Convention's books A REPORT AS TO WHETHER OR NOT ANY OF THE STATE CONVENTION FUNDS WERE USED IN CONNECTION

WITH THE NORTH ROCKY MOUNT CHURCH CASE. Our committee contends that admission has been made, in a letter from the General Secretary and Treasurer of the State Convention, that there was an attempt to take steps to

get the Convention to "aid in paying the attorney's fees in connection with the trial." And we have asked that the report of the Certified Public Accountant be made public by the General Board . . . . The General Board meets this month.

## THE 1956 SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION AND THE ISSUE OF LOCAL CHURCH AUTONOMY

By James M. Bullman

One leading newspaper, *The Courier-Journal*, of Louisville, Ky., ventured to predict that the question of local church autonomy would be the "principal problem" of the convention (May 30, 1956). Writing on the eve of the convention, Mr. Ora Spaid, Religion Editor of that paper, stated: "A two-pronged move is shaping up here tonight to ask the rapidly growing Southern Baptist Convention, which opens tomorrow, to restate and clarify its relation to a local Southern Baptist Church" (May 30).

One prong of the movement was led by Dr. R. E. Milam, Executive Secretary of the Baptist General Convention of Oregon-Washington, and represented several secretaries of state conventions and a number of editors of state denominational papers, along with certain other Baptist leaders such as Dr. R. G. Lee and Dr. W. A. Criswell. This group had signed a resolution calling for certain matters, including the question of "the sovereignty and primacy of the local church," to be discussed "before the Executive Committee and the Southern Baptist Convention" and calling for a committee to be appointed to study these questions.

The other prong was made up of those of us in North Carolina who in recent months have been protesting against the North Carolina Supreme Court decision in the North Rocky Mount Church case. And there was some alliance between these two prongs, for Dr. Milam had asked for our support in his undertaking and had been assured of same (cf. *Journal and Sentinel*, Winston-Salem, N. C., April 15, 1956).

### Collapse of Main Prong

At convention time, however, the Milam movement had collapsed, as far as concerned the undertaking of any action at the convention. Dr. Milam told me on the eve of the convention that he had been persuaded by Baylor President, Dr. W. R. White, upon whom he had mainly relied to lead in presenting the issue, that it would simply cause "too much trouble" for the matter to be brought up. Thus Dr. Milam had come to feel that it might "hurt the work of the program" to press the issue. (We respect those who feel this way, but we see in this all-too-frequent recourse to inaction a very subtle and very dangerous error. If we really believe in Baptist principle, what is the purpose in refusing to correct a serious violation of Baptist principle underlying our program on the excuse that it would hurt this program, when the program itself has already become to so alarming an extent *un-Baptistic* because of this very serious violation of Baptist principle? How can Baptists justifiably defend a program unless that program is really Baptistic?)

Then, sensing that apparently all the other Southern Baptist leaders upon whom he had looked for support in this issue had come to take such an attitude, Dr. Milam was certain that it would be hopeless to try to get the convention to clarify the question of its relationship to a local church. The Milam prong certainly represented by far the more politically powerful part of the movement; and with its collapse, it might well seem that those of us from North Carolina had no chance at all of getting anything across on the convention floor. There-



fore Dr. Milam pleaded with me not to try to introduce the issue. He felt that the attempt would meet with such devastating defeat—since the guns of the leadership were massed so heavily against us — that the cause for autonomy would suffer irreparable loss. He cautioned that in this instance “retreat” would be the course of wisdom.

### Determination To Press On

A consultation with those connected with the North Carolina autonomy movement, however, disclosed the presence of another attitude — an attitude of confidence that this was the hour to move to get the Southern Convention to reverse what seemed to us the downward course toward the destruction of the freedom of the local congregations.

We proposed to put before the convention a *constitutional amendment* and a *resolution*.

Since the statement on congregational autonomy in the constitution of the Southern Baptist Convention (found in Article IV, “Authority”) had been used as evidence in the trial of the North Rocky Mount Church case, and had not sufficed to enable the majority of that local congregation to keep its property in its attempted withdrawal from cooperation with the Southern Convention, we proposed to introduce a *constitutional amendment* which would set forth in unmistakable terms the recognition of the right of a local church to discontinue cooperation with the convention. However, since an amendment to the constitution must be presented to the convention a year before it can be acted on, all that we could do in this convention would be to get the amendment before the messengers. For more immediate action, which we felt advisable due to the current critical situation, we intended to introduce a *resolution* at this convention: the resolution calling upon the convention to reaffirm its historic stand on congregational autonomy and to repudiate the concept of a local church as set forth in the North Carolina Supreme Court decision in the Rocky Mount case.

It was well known that we intended to present these two measures. Weeks before, we had notified Dr. C. C. Warren,

and also the secular press (cf. *Winston-Salem Journal*, Winston-Salem, N. C., Feb. 8, 1956) of our intention to introduce an amendment and a resolution. Also, we gave to the press on the eve of the convention the actual text of the amendment and resolution.

### First Feeble Efforts

Our group felt that there was an obstacle facing us more formidable than that of the opposition from the leadership. That obstacle was the lack of information on the part of the greater number of the messengers concerning the current issue of congregational autonomy. We well knew how that even in North Carolina so many persons seemed uninformed as to the situation. Thus we felt that if our resolution was to receive favorable consideration at the convention, the messengers would have to become somewhat acquainted with the issue before being asked to act upon it.

Therefore we proposed to make a move at the beginning of the convention to try to get the issue before the people. When the Committee on Order of Business reported, a motion was made to amend the report so as to have added to the program an hour of discussion from the floor on “the subject of the autonomy of the local Baptist church.” Dr. C. K. Rand, of High Point, N. C., after speaking briefly for the motion was stopped by the moderator, who informed Dr. Rand, “time is up” (A rather unusual action, inasmuch as no order of business had as yet been adopted and the convention had placed no limitation whatsoever upon time for discussion!).

This attempt to amend the report was soundly voted down; although, as a writer of the secular press stated to me shortly afterwards, we did get a “rather respectable vote.” From these first efforts to get the autonomy question on the floor, it might well have seemed as though Dr. Milam’s fears as to our certain defeat were well-founded. Yet we were encouraged by the fact that many messengers had at least come to know that there was such a thing as a real issue concerning the autonomy of the local church and that this issue was regarded by some persons as of such se-

riousness as to merit a period of discussion from the floor. We were hoping to gather strength as the convention moved along.

(Our efforts to amend the report of the Committee on Order of Business have even been criticized as being improper — as if a Baptist messenger at a Baptist meeting did not have a right to attempt to amend a committee's report! What is the purpose even in voting to accept a committee's report if the whole thing is supposed to be accepted without one being permitted to offer a somewhat contrary suggestion?)

#### Report of the Historical Commission

In connection with our effort to inform the messengers as to the autonomy issue, our group considered introduction of the issue at one of the several points on the agenda where it legitimately could be brought forth.

We decided to seek to introduce the issue in connection with the report of the Historical Commission, which was scheduled on the second day, Thursday, at 9:15 A.M.

A most confusing and alarming situation has come to exist concerning the widely-publicized book, *The Southern Baptist Convention: 1845-1953*, by Dr. W. W. Barnes. It has been discovered that some of that book's basic statements in affirmation of the autonomy of the local church have actually been repudiated, under oath, by the author himself even before the book had come off the press. This of course raises the very serious question as to what credence our people can place in such a book.

Certainly, so serious a matter ought to be brought before our Baptist people; and, certainly, the proper and legitimate place on the convention program for such a matter would be in connection with the work of the convention's Historical Commission. The manuscript of the book had been handed over to that commission with the request that the commission "get it published," which request had been "accepted" (*Annual of the SBC*, 1953, p. 431); and the book had been strongly endorsed by the commission (*Annual of the SBC*, 1954, p. 411).

And the introduction of the issue in this manner would serve measurably to acquaint the messengers with the *resolution* which we hoped to introduce later; for some of the book's important statements to which reference has above been made contained the very words in our *resolution* which would seek to get the convention to reaffirm its historic principle of congregational autonomy.

Before giving his remarks on the commission's report, Dr. Norman W. Cox, the commission's Executive Secretary, asked that if there be any discussion that it be before his remarks. At this point I got the floor and commenced to point out the need that the Historical Commission give some consideration to the fact that a most serious situation has come to exist in regard to those statements in Dr. Barnes' book that were repudiated in court. I was ruled out of order by Vice-President, Dr. Kyle Yates, who said that the matter which I was discussing had no place in connection with a report by the Historical Commission. I asked him if it were not a part of the business of the Historical Commission to concern itself with works on Baptist history (It might have been added: especially works on Baptist history which that commission itself had undertaken to have published!). He replied that I would have to ask that question to the head of the Historical Commission. Whereupon I turned to Dr. Cox and asked him the same question. But the Executive Secretary did not answer that seemingly simple-enough question. Then the moderator told me that if I wanted to say anything that I must offer it in the form of an amendment to Dr. Cox's report. I asked when I should offer an amendment to the report. I was told to wait until Dr. Cox had spoken concerning his report.

Then, following Dr. Cox's remarks and his motion that the report be adopted, I addressed the chair and asked to be allowed to offer the amendment. But the moderator said that time was up. (It is my understanding of parliamentary procedure that if time has permitted a motion to be offered, then that motion is subject to amendment unless the body calls for a consideration of the question,



so as to preclude the offering of an amendment.) Then Dr. C. K. Rand moved an extension of time, namely, a two minutes' extension. On a close voice vote it was ruled that the motion for extension had lost. (Shortly afterwards, Dr. L. E. Barton, the noted authority on parliamentary procedure, spoke to me privately and told me that the amendment which I was going to offer to the Historical Commission's report was not germane and thus should not have been permitted. I asked him how it could be said that my amendment was not germane, when as yet neither he nor the moderator nor anybody else knew what was stated in the amendment which I proposed to bring!)

### Keeping It Off The Floor

Later on in the Thursday morning session it became evident that severe obstacles would have to be overcome if our proposed resolution and constitutional amendment were so much as to be brought to the floor. Indeed, it was related to us by certain men of the press that convention leaders had expressed their intention *even to keep us from getting the floor with our resolution and constitutional amendment!*

Mr. Phillip Thomas, Religion Editor of the *Commercial Appeal*, of Memphis, Tenn., has described the situation prevailing on that Thursday morning session as follows: "Speaking to reporters later, off the convention floor, Dr. Warren had said the Bulman resolution would never be brought to the floor" (June 1, 1956). Mr. Thomas reports Dr. Warren as saying, "if Dr. Bulman gets up there," then they would "*saw him off*"! (*loc. cit.*, emphasis supplied). Similarly, Mr. Ora Spaid has written that "convention leaders made it plain to reporters that they did not expect to find time for Dr. Bulman" (*The Courier Journal*, June 4, 1956.)

The obstacles to be overcome in getting the floor became startlingly evident when the Thursday morning session reached that point on the agenda entitled, "Miscellaneous Business, Election of Officers." At that point the chairman of the Committee on Order of Business moved that the "*Election of Officers*" be

postponed until 4:30 that afternoon, so that the convention could proceed immediately with the Sunday School Board report. It is to be noted that nothing was said about "*Miscellaneous Business*" in the motion; which would mean that, with the postponement of "Election of Officers" and the immediate consideration of the Sunday School Board report, the item of "*Miscellaneous Business*" — which had already been accepted by the body as a part of the program to precede the Sunday School Board report — would simply be dismissed by arbitrary decree. My efforts to say a word at this point have thus been described by Mr. Phillip Thomas:

"The minister was . . . back on the platform, seeking to be heard at a time when 'miscellaneous business' was scheduled on the program.

"Dr. C. C. Warren . . . refused to let Dr. Bulman speak. Waving the North Carolina minister aside, Dr. Warren said: '. . . We're not concerned with miscellaneous business now'" (*Commercial Appeal*, June 1).

Whereupon I asked if that meant that there would be no miscellaneous business that day. I was told by the moderator to go and ask the chairman of the Committee on Order of Business. Then — realizing the potential danger to our efforts should there be no miscellaneous business at all on that day — I asked the chair for an interpretation of the Convention's constitution on a particular point, so that I would know if a contemplated move would be out of order. I was told by the moderator that *when* I attempted to make such a move that I would then find out whether or not I would be out of order. (I realized, however, that by so waiting I might find out too late. For, according to a particular interpretation of the convention's constitution, a proposed constitutional amendment cannot even be read after the second day of the convention. The constitution states that no amendment "may be considered after the second day of the Convention" [Article XIV]. As to whether it cannot be considered as respects voting, or as respects the receiving of information, might well be sub-



ject to difference of opinion. Now, since Thursday was the second day of the convention, it was obvious that if the constitution were construed in a certain way, then our proposed amendment could not so much as be read at that convention! Shortly afterward, I found my suspicions confirmed; I was told by Mr. Ed Campbell, who was covering the convention for the Associated Press, that he was informed that an amendment to the constitution could not even be read after the second day. Mr. Campbell made it clear that the whole thing was immaterial to him, that he was merely there to report what happened,—but that as a plain matter of fact it looked as though it would be impossible for the amendment even to be put on the floor.)

And when I consulted the chairman of the Committee on Order of Business, I was told that there would be no miscellaneous business on that, the second, day. The one place on the program for the second day where it would be in order to read a proposed amendment had been taken away, and taken away—let it be remembered—not by vote of the body, but by simple arbitrary fiat. We could, of course, try to come back the third day in the period of "Miscellaneous Business" (if there should actually be such a period!) with our *resolution*; but in view of what had already happened, it hardly seemed likely that we would so much as get the floor.

### The New Issue

Failure of efforts to bring the autonomy issue to the floor caused the question of Baptist freedom to take on a different perspective. The real issue had come to be not that of the freedom of the local church, but rather that of the freedom of a member of a democratic deliberative assembly to be heard. As the Religion Editor of the Louisville *Courier-Journal* has analyzed the situation that had come to characterize the convention on that Thursday morning: "As the convention wore on, the North Carolina pastor's endeavor ceased to be one of local church autonomy and *became an issue of his right to speak*" (June 4, emphasis supplied).

The State paper of Virginia Baptists,

*Religious Herald*, says:

*"Probably of greatest significance at Kansas City were the incidents which clearly demonstrated the trend away from democratic procedure. . . . the messengers who gather each year constitute themselves into the Southern Baptist Convention. They become and are the sovereign body. Now, the sovereignty of a democratic body rests in the members who have equal rights and privileges except as authority is delegated by organic law to duly chosen officers and agents. The constitution of the Southern Baptist Convention assigns no authority to the president; therefore he is restricted in his duties to presiding over the sessions of the body and to appointing committees described in the by-laws.*

*"In a democratic assembly a first obligation of the presiding officer is to assure the right of each member to express his opinions or to claim his privileges. The president should do this impartially without a display of feeling and without remarks that might disclose his personal attitude towards a member or the proposition which the member would present for the consideration of the body. This applies in all truly democratic bodies, regardless of size. The burden of responsibility upon the presiding officer increases with the size of the body, but the rights and privileges of the individual remain. To claim that the Southern Baptist Convention with 12,000 members is a democracy means that each messenger has the right to be heard in accordance with accepted parliamentary procedure. A presiding officer violates basic principles when he attempts, or permits attempts, to protect a sovereign body composed of competent individuals against the expression of objective opinions. A presiding officer should pains-takingly refrain from prejudging issues. A democratic body is sovereign and competent in itself to receive all matters and to dispose of them. An impression of unity created by squelching unpleasant or controversial issues is both false and harmful. To say that*

*the size of the Southern Baptist Convention prevents the application of democratic procedures in the transaction of business is to deny that the Convention is any longer a democratic body. To say that it is absurd to attempt to apply democratic principles to a body of 12,000 members is to admit that the claim of democracy for the Convention is itself an absurdity."*

(June 14, 1956, emphasis supplied.)

Surely, the Southern Baptist Convention had come to a most critical point. Was even the semblance of democratic procedure to be thrown aside?

### Sudden Change

The time-worn expression about it being darkest before dawn could hardly be more fittingly applied than to what happened on that Thursday. Shortly after noon, while I was in the press room, I received a phone call from the Rev. Harold G. Sanders, chairman of the Committee on Order of Business. I was shocked when he asked, "Would it be satisfactory with you if we had a fifteen minute period for miscellaneous business this afternoon after the election of officers?" Actually, only about three minutes were needed, for all that was desired by us was the reading of our proposed constitutional amendment and our resolution. Shortly before five that afternoon, therefore, we "won a two-day fight" by getting to present the issue to the convention in the form of reading the proposed constitutional amendment and the resolution (*Commercial Appeal*, June 1). As stated by Mr. Phillip Thomas, "The move by convention leaders to let Dr. Bulman have the floor came as a surprise late Thursday in light of an earlier statement that day by Dr. Casper C. Warren, convention president, that the minister would be 'sawn off' . . ." (*Commercial Appeal*, June 2).

What accounted for this sudden change on the part of the convention leadership? After "Miscellaneous Business" had been so summarily dismissed, and after the chairman of the Committee on Order of Business had said that there would be no miscellaneous business that day, why — hardly more than an hour later — did the chairman approach

us with the generous offer a fifteen minute period for miscellaneous business?

Perhaps two things can be said in answer: first, that the leadership sensed that a number of the messengers had come to resent the procedure that was being followed; second, that the leadership realized that this procedure was almost certainly going to be given a "bad press."

In substantiation of the first suggested answer, we may consider some comments written by a prominent South Carolina minister, Dr. C. Earl Cooper. Having stated that "the president himself has been rather cool toward allowing the privilege to speak" to certain messengers, Dr. Cooper comments:

"Some of the messengers have reacted rather strongly against this disciplinarianism. They have the feeling that, although it is sometimes disturbing and time consuming, old-fashioned Baptist democracy must be maintained. A messenger must have his right to speak, or have the convention vote him down" (*Greenville News*, Greenville, S. C., June 2, 1956).

In connection with the second suggested answer, the following may be noted from Mr. Ora Spaid:

"Prodded perhaps by the fact that the press had put Dr. Bulman's issue before the reading public, even if it had not got to the floor of the convention, the S. B. C. leadership relented, and gave him an opportunity to speak" (*Courier-Journal*, June 4).

### Amendment and Resolution

The proposed constitutional amendment, to be acted on by the 1957 Southern Baptist Convention, which was read late Thursday afternoon would add the following to Article IV, the statement on "Authority" in the constitution:

"This convention does not claim that affiliation with this convention is in any way necessary for a church to be a Missionary Baptist Church; nor does this convention claim that affiliation with any other Baptist body, whether district association or state convention, is in any way necessary for a church to be affiliated with this convention; nor does this convention claim



that a church's affiliation with this convention, as conceived by this convention, is in any degree of such a nature as would prevent a church that once has entered into affiliation with this convention from discontinuing that affiliation, should that church for any reason whatsoever decide to discontinue that affiliation.

(No question is raised as to the fact that the constitution's original statement on "Authority" was certainly intended to safeguard the freedom of the churches. But the fact remains that, in the trial of the North Rocky Mount Church case, that very statement was used in evidence, but to no avail in protecting the freedom of that particular church. Circumstances have clearly rendered necessary a more specific definition of the convention's position on the freedom of the local church.)

Then, feeling that the current critical situation made appropriate more immediate action on the part of the convention, the following resolution was read:

"WHEREAS the Supreme Court of North Carolina has dispossessed the majority of the members of a local Baptist Church of their property following the decision of those members to discontinue affiliation with the Southern Baptist Convention;

AND WHEREAS, "because of the North Carolina decision, no longer is there unanimity of opinion among the highest courts of this land as to the degree of congregational autonomy or polity possessed by the membership of a Baptist Church" (Luther D. Burrus, *The Seminary Review*, Vol. II, No. 2); AND WHEREAS in the trial of this church case certain prominent persons connected with the Southern Baptist Convention gave testimony which contradicted the historic Baptist principle of the complete autonomy of the local church;

AND WHEREAS, following from the above-stated considerations, confusion has arisen as to just what is the relation between a local church and the Southern Baptist Convention;

**BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED**

that we now reaffirm the following statement on Baptist congregational principle which was issued by the 1928 Southern Baptist Convention:

'All Baptist general bodies are voluntary organizations . . . Churches may seek to fulfill their obligation to extend Christ's kingdom by co-operating with these general organizations, but always on a purely voluntary basis, and without surrendering in any way or degree their right of self-determination' (cf. W. W. Barnes, *The Southern Baptist Convention: A Study in the Development of Ecclesiology; The Southern Baptist Convention: 1945-1953*);

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that we now repudiate the following definition of the nature of a Baptist Church which was issued by the 1954 North Carolina Supreme Court decision:

'In the event of a split within a local church, that "part of congregation which remains true to faith, customs, usages and practices accepted by both factions prior to dissension, is entitled to control and management of church property' (*North Carolina Supreme Court Reports*, Vol. 241, No. III)."

As stated by the Associated Press, "At Bulman's request, the resolution was sent to the Resolutions Committee for study" (June 1).

#### **Report of Committee on Resolutions**

The report of the Committee on Resolutions, whose chairman was Dr. Louie Newton, was given at 9:40 Friday morning.

As was seen above, our resolution had asked that the convention reaffirm the following statement which had been issued by the 1928 Southern Baptist Convention (which statement had been repudiated by Dr. W. W. Barnes in his court testimony):

"All Baptist general bodies are voluntary organizations . . . Churches may seek to fulfill their obligation to extend Christ's kingdom by co-operating with these general organizations, but always on a purely voluntary basis, and without surrendering in any way

or degree their right of self-determination."

The report of the committee recommended that the convention accept not merely the above excerpt from the 1928 statement but also the full statement which had been issued by the 1928 Southern Baptist Convention on the relation of the Convention to other Baptist bodies. The report stated:

"Since the resolution offered by James M. Bulman (N. C.) raises the question of the relation of the Southern Baptist Convention to local churches and other Baptist bodies, and refers in part to a previous action of the Convention on this vital principle, we recommend that this Convention reaffirm the full statement referred to in the resolution . . . as recorded on pages 32-33, 1928 Annual, entitled 'Relation of Southern Baptist Convention to Other Baptist Bodies' " (*Southern Baptist Convention Bulletin*, 1956, fourth day).

This notable 1928 statement covers some, 1,000 words, some of the more significant of which are the following:

"All Christian relationships are free and voluntary . . . Christ's authority is accepted as final for the believer in all things . . .

"The relations of the believer with other Christians are free and voluntary and subject only to the authority of Jesus Christ.

"A church of Christ is a free and voluntary association of believers, in His name, in obedience to His command, and for the carrying out of His purposes.

"It follows that each church is autonomous or self-determining in all matters pertaining to its own life and activities. It is not subject to any other church or organization of any kind whatsoever, but only to Christ and His authority.

"*All Baptist general bodies are voluntary organizations, established by individuals who wish to co-operate for some common end or ends in the kingdom of God. This Convention is not an ecclesiastical body composed of churches, nor a federal body composed of state conventions. Churches may seek to fulfill their obligation to extend Christ's kingdom by co-operating with these general organizations, but always on a purely voluntary basis, and without surrendering in any way or degree their right of self-determination.* These associations, unions, or conventions . . . are all similar to churches in the fundamental principle of their organization and life in that each is independent of all others in its work, free, fraternal, autonomous, or self-determining in its sphere and activities.

"The principle of co-operation between individuals and churches and general bodies in pursuit of great common ends is also a basic teaching of the gospel. In all co-operative endeavor the principle of autonomy or self-determination should be carefully conserved". . . (*loc. cit.*, emphasis supplied).

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*On To Victory!!*

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